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Powerful Owl diet

Owl specialists in Europe and North America often ask about Australian *Ninox* because of the Powerful Owl. The common name 'Powerful' and scientific names *Ninox strenua*, the 'strong' Hawk-Owl, summon up a half-hawk, half-owl hybrid, a yellow-eyed, broad-shouldered, forest dweller staring down on mortals. And often, that is how you find one.

Powerful Owls dwell in wet or dry eucalypt forests in south-eastern Australia, mainly on the east or coastal side of the Great Divide. Their range is limited by a line drawn from Rockhampton, Queensland, in the north down through New South Wales, around the belly of Australia to south-eastern South Australia. As forest birds they tend to avoid deserts and dry places. Some of them do, however, live inland, west of the Dividing Range at certain points – in Queensland as far west as Carnarvon Gorge, in New South Wales as far west as a north-south line joining Yass to Tenterfield, in Namadgi and Tidbinbilla in the Australian Capital Territory (Higgins 1999).

The closely related Southern Boobook takes spiders, insects, small birds and mammals, but Powerful Owls prefer larger mammals. They are not solely confined to tall open forest while hunting. They hunt where there is ample prey to support them for a time, then they move on. They can live in open woodland and cities, such as botanic gardens and forested suburbs in Sydney and Brisbane where they prey on birds, fruit bats and possums. Despite their large size, we know less about Powerful Owls than North American ornithologists know about large owls such as the Great Horned or Great Grey Owl, because Powerful Owls are more difficult to study. We know little about how they sneak through forest and ambush prey, but we do know which prey they ambush. As mentioned above, owls differ from most